been established and the Indo French Water Week has been organised in Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkatta. The follow up action on these recommendations was discussed during the third meeting of the Indo-French Forum which was held on 6 & 7 September, 1999 in Paris. This meeting discussed measures to promote economic co-operation, scientific co-operation and cultural co-operation.

Demand for Larger Haj Quota

338. SHRI PRAFULL GORADIA. Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Central Govt, has sought a larger Haj quota from the Saudi Government this year;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

(c) what is the amount of financial assistance for travel and other facilities per pilgrim; and

(d) what is the total number of Haj pilgrims and total financial assistance to them for travel and other facilities during the last five years, year-wise?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF THE EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) to (d) Indian pilgrims go for Haj both through the Haj Committee, Mumhai, and privately through registered private tour operators. The total number of pilgrims from India who went for Haj in the last five years was as follows:—

Year	Total Number of Pilgrims
1995	45,505
1996	75,346
1997	81,766
1998	94,602
1999	98,072

Over the last two years, the Saudi authorities had prescribed a quota of 91,000 for Indian pilgrims. Even though visas beyond this quota were issued both in 1998 and in 1999, thousands of Indian pilgrims who wished to perform Haj still could not obtain visas.

The Haj quota for each country is fixed on the basis of the formula of one pilgrim for every 1,000 persons of the Muslim population in the country. Given that the Muslim population of India is estimated at over 12.5 crores. Government has been seeking an increase in the Indian quota for the last two years. This year, Saudi Government authorities accepted our contention and the Indian quota for Haj-2000 has been fixed at 1,20,000.

The only area where financial assistance in the form of a subsidy is provided by the Government to defray the pilgrims' expenses on Haj is that of air fare in respect of pilgrims going for Haj through the Haj Committee. This facility commenced in 1992 and is not extended to pilgrims going for Haj privately. Since 1992, the Haj air charter fare has been fixed at Rs. 12,000, with the Government meeting the balance between this amount and the actual air charter fare per pilgrim negotiated with the air charter company. (The amount of the subsidy is met from the budget of the Ministry of Civil Aviation.)

The total air charter subsidy over the last five years has been as follows:—

Year	Total Govt, subsidy in crores of Rs.
1995	16.77
1996	38.46
1997	80.01
1998	119.44
1999	109.55

For the welfare and assistance of the approximately one lakh Indian Haj pilgrims in Saudi Arabia, during the Haj season, the Government augments the permanent staff in the Consulate General in Jeddah by deputing upto 400 officials, including a 225-member medical mission. The Consulate General also recruits about 500 seasonal staff members locally and sets up control rooms at the Haj terminal in Jeddah, as also at the main Haj offices in Makkah and Madinah and the ten branch offices and medical centres in Makkah. The Consulate General supervises the movement of pilgrims from one point to the other during the Haj season, though day-to-day responsibility is vested in the local Government and its agents. The Consulate General also assists pilgrims at the Haj air terminal in Jeddah and ensures the welfare and smooth movement of incoming and outgoing pilgrims.

Linking of foreign missions via wireless network

339. SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have decided to link New Delhi with foreign missions via a wireless network;

(b) if so, the details and present status thereof;

(c) whether Public Accounts Committee has made any objection on this decision; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) and (b) Yes Sir. A High Frequency Radio Communication (HFRC) network has been